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AUTHOR Peterson, Elizabeth A.
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ABSTRACT

Democracy is the foundation of U.S. society. Democratic principles permeate all institutions, and the belief that individuals have the right to representation and a voice in decisions that affect their daily lives is supported by the highest laws of the land. The implementation of this agenda has created ethical problems for program planners and program participants. Although democracy calls for each voice to be heard, the voices represented around the planning table are generally those of individuals whose position and privilege have given them power to make decisions for others. These mixed messages have created a tension between program planners and teachers whose mission is to reproduce the status quo and the diverse groups who see a need for social change. The historical struggle of African American people to become full and equal participants in this society is one of "separate but equal" and the erroneous assumption that integration would make all things equal. In instances where African Americans had ownership--a place at the planning table--black people were being empowered. African Americans need to be at the planning table, because the agenda should be uplift, not assimilation. Citizens in a democracy must be guaranteed that the voices of those whose race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic class position them at the margins of the society will be heard. (YLB)

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# DEMOCRACY, ETHICS AND PROGRAM PLANNING
## AAACE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY SESSION
## CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
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**Elizabeth A. Peterson, Ed.D.**

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Democracy and the Planning Process

Democracy: Long before the first AAACE conference was held, the modern practice of adult education was born. Modern adult education was first conceived at the beginning of the 20th century at a time when the United States was growing rapidly; new immigrants were arriving daily from western Europe and populating the nation's cities at an enormous rate. People were pushing west as the boundaries of this country were expanding to accommodate new arrivals and adventuring settlers. Native Americans were displaced to reservations as the wealth of their traditional homelands was discovered. Asian immigrants in the west were tapped as laborers, they worked in mines and helped build the nation's railroads. At the same time an internal immigration was taking place. What came to be known as the Great Migration began in the decade after the first World War as African Americans left the farms in the South to work in the industrial North. The end of post Civil War Reconstruction brought an unwritten social code known as "Jim Crow." African Americans sought out the northern cities hoping to finally exercise the rights and freedoms guaranteed to them by law, but denied to them in the South.

During this time for most adult educators the spoken mission was the preparation of "good citizens" and citizenship schools and evening programs sprang up all over the country. Here the educator's aim was to provide new arrivals with information and skills that could be put to good use in a growing society.

Today, the United States of America prides itself on being the longest standing democracy in the world. During the early formation of this country the leadership recognized that through allowing all "free" individuals a governing voice (albeit an indirect voice through elected representatives) that a system of government "for the people and by the people" could be a reality.

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Therefore, democracy is the foundation of our society. Democratic principles permeate all institutions and the belief that individuals have the right to representation and the right to have a voice in decisions that have an impact on their daily lives is supported by the highest laws of the land. This is the American way, this is the way it should be, right?

Ethics: The implementation of this agenda has created some real ethical problems for program planners as well as for program participants. For on one hand democracy calls for each voice to be heard. However, more often than not, the voices represented around the planning table are those of individuals whose position and privilege have given them power to make decisions for others. For decades hidden in the agenda of creating a "melting pot" society, grounded in the principles of democracy, was the assumption that there are a single set of "American" values, morals, knowledge and culture. These American values, morals, knowledge, and culture are of course those that were derived from European traditions and transported to this country by powerful men who were able to establish themselves as the ruling elite. Despite all claims of equal representation, throughout our history certain groups have had the privilege of having their voices heard as others were silenced. Those who wished to participate in this society had to be colorless in a sense (and it should be noted that for many years they also had to be male) , they had to be able to blend in or "melt" physically, mentally, and often spiritually. If you could do all of this then you were accepted as citizens-worthy of the opportunities and all of the prosperity that this nation affords. However, if for some reason it is impossible to blend in or melt, (skin color certainly prohibits this) or it is likewise impossible for a people to accept and adapt to the "American Way" then they are deemed as failures. And those who go a step further and actually wish to preserve and celebrate their own values, traditions, and culture, are seen as radical and subversive; as dangerous elements that need to be eliminated.

This stripping away of peoples ties to past traditions and values for the sake of the democracy has been justified throughout our history. What creates the ethical dilemma is that at the same time that people are being stripped of their culture and values another message is preached:

America is a land of individuals, a land where the individual has freedom . What kind of freedom forces entire groups of people to give up what they are, to become something different in order to participate is society as unequal equal players? These are mixed messages that have created a tension between program planners and teachers whose mission is to reproduce our society and the diverse groups who see a need for social change.

Today, while many things have changed, some have not. Still all too often those who are in decision making positions, and therefore seated at the planning table; are individuals from the dominant culture, whose position of privilege allows them to make decisions for others. These individuals either by class, rank, education, or birth, are considered to have the superior knowledge or expertise which qualifies them to make choices which impact other's lives. They decide: what program will be offered; when it will be offered; who is and who is not eligible to participate in the program; what the participants will learn; and how they will learn it. Finally, they determine how learning will be evaluated; what constitutes successful completion of the program. Typically the program participant makes none of these decisions or at least very few of them. The participants learn to accept what the planners, developers, and sometimes teachers, have already accepted about themselves: that they know what is best for their students, they know what "those people" need.

Mixed Messages/Deepening Tensions

The conflicts created by the mixed messages that are central to our democratic society become really apparent when one looks at the historical struggle of African American people to become full and equal participants in this society. For nearly 100 years since the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation black educators have lead African American in this struggle. They have stressed the importance of the role that education would play in creating a prosperous African American community. What I found really interesting as I worked on the manuscript for Freedom Road was that there was a common thread in the beliefs of all of the individuals highlighted in the work: they all believed in the American Dream. Fanny Coppin, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B.

Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Alain Locke all believed that African American people one day would have an important and equal place in American society. They believed that education would serve as the primary means to uplift or empower the entire race. While recognizing that years of slavery had created a large gap between black and white Americans, these leaders believed that education, hard work, unity, pride, and self reliance would in time help erase the barriers and close the gap. African Americans would be allowed full access to the goods and services that would enable them to prosper.

The message was uplift, the message was empowerment. The strategies were often different, but the message was the same. During this time there was little talk of integration. Perhaps the understanding was that racial integration was not going to happen, Plessy vs. Ferguson had at least for a time established "separate but equal" as the reasonable solution to the "race problem." But, within this restrictive environment Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver together worked to educate black farm and domestic workers in the rural South; black colleges were established; in Philadelphia, Fanny Coppin became the principal at Institute for Colored Youth -which flourished for 30 years under her leadership; Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement League Association and the African Communities League, and Alain Locke became the father of the Harlem Renaissance. For each of these endeavors (although admittedly often financed by white philanthropy) the planning and implementation was informed by an African American perspective. African American leadership was at the planning table and uplift, empowerment was at the heart of the effort.

Unfortunately there were not enough Fanny Coppins and Marcus Garveys to go around. The truth was that for many African Americans, "separate but equal" was never equal. The schools that were available to children and adults were often not adequately supported. It is difficult to learn with no books or supplies. But, it was erroneous to think that integration was the only thing needed to make all things equal. This was not just an issue necessarily of relationship, it was also an issue of ownership. In instances where African Americans had ownership-a place at

the planning table-black people were being empowered. In cases where African Americans were relegated the "left-overs" from the white schools, they were left powerless. In 1933 Carter G. Woodson addressed this when he wrote:

> Negroes have no control over their education and have little voice in their other affairs pertaining thereto. In a few cases Negroes have been chosen as members of public boards of education, and some have been chosen as member of private boards, but these Negroes are always in such a small minority that they do not figure in the final working out of the educational program. The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them.

Woodson recognized then that it was a false assumption to believe that a planning table made up of individuals who up until that time had oppressed black people would deal with them fairly when it came to empowering them. African Americans needed to be at the planning table because their agenda was uplift- not assimilation. The message was one that celebrated the best of what black people were and could be-not we are inferior, therefore we need to be like you. Despite the efforts of leaders like Garvey, Du Bois, and Locke who believed that African Americans could be prosperous, viable citizens while at the same time maintaining a connection to a heritage and culture that was born in Africa and transformed through slavery to something uniquely American; popular sentiment changed and many African Americans supported the notion that white was better. White schools were better, white teachers were better, white stores were better. . . the list goes on and on. The black community died.

While I'm not preaching separation and a return to the "separate but equal" policy that served only to promote racial hostility and prejudice, I do believe that something was lost after Brown vs. the Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which forced desegregation and did very little to promote true integration. In many instances I believe the baby was thrown out with the bath water. Schools, programs, and institutions that had for many years served as focal points in a flourishing black community were abandoned for white controlled institutions that were now forced to serve blacks. Worse still I believe was the complete erasure of the contributions of African American leaders and educators to our history; the history of our nation and the history of

our profession. For example many do not realize that Alain Locke was an early member of the parent organization of AAACE, the AEA, or that Ambrose Caliver, another African American, was one of the first presidents of the AEA. These men were important in shaping the modern practice of adult education. Yet they are virtually written out of the history.

The struggle of the African American people is but one example of how conflicting agendas can impact the real success of the educational process. But the issue is not just one of race, ethnicity, or gender; the real issue is power. We must recognize that even within a democratic society powerful individuals will always be heard. The true measure of any democracy or for that manner any institution, agency, project, or program within that democracy is the degree to which citizens are guaranteed that there will always be an attempt to listen for the voices of those whose race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic class positions them at the margins of the society. We must protect the margins for the fabric of any society first begins to unravel from the ends. As we adult educators go back to our communities and engage in a planning process, before we make decisions that will impact the lives of those we serve; we should first look around our planning tables and see who is represented there. And then we should make some decisions.